

Lovely Stories Make Lovely Songs



Kim Barlow's new CD, *Champ*, is lovely. That is a word I hardly ever use, "lovely". I never really find use for it in daily speech. It's a girly word, truth be told but, in this case, lovely is the right word. In *Champ*, Barlow continues a songwriting journey that defines for me an expression of her art.

I reflect upon her last album, *luckyburden* - the one with songs and stories from the silver mining history of Keno City - to find similar, tangible, even palatable feelings and failings that Barlow infuses her stories and characters with.

This ability to bring an ordinary person or story to song.

Her stories and reflections in *Champ* are as well-detailed and lovingly presented with quiet dignity, no great fanfare is needed: real life rarely has moments like these.

In its stead, *Champ* gives intimate, deeply personal stories of love and ponies, drunken escapades, hiking with friends and more ponies.

Speaking of ponies, the CD opens up with a story of *Pony Camp*. This song, if I may be so general, is typical Kim Barlow: short and sweet, packed with lots of detail. A delightful story of two girls set apart from their "betters" to find wonder and delight, for themselves one summer.

Strawberry Roan, another pony song, is a ballad of great proportion, interspecies joy is turned to small horror that time distances to tell this tale.

I found this to in the same circles as the traditional *Twa Corbies* or any number of

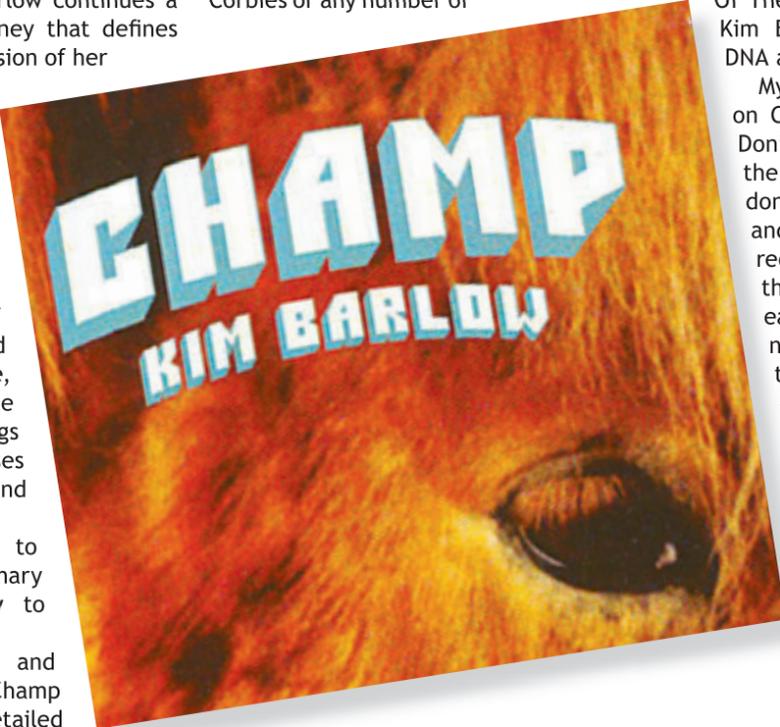
getting in the way or disturbing the flow, you understand, but it is deliberate.

I'm a sucker for this sort of audio shading; it's the complement to the music and stories that makes these small outbursts so special.

The songs on this album have that unmistakable blend of roots sensibility and lyrics that reveal their truth incrementally ... classic Barlow, if I may. *Out Of Your Head*, *Things I Miss*, *Out Of The Woods* all have Kim Barlow's musical DNA all over them.

My favourite song on *Champ* is *But He Don't*. Resigned to the fact that "he don't", "she don't" and "I don't", we recognize the way that feelings for each other often never reach the perfect conjunction and probably never will.

This song for some reason pushes my *Beatle* button. It's one of those



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Tom Waits songs. The production of this track even takes on a Waits inspired *Bone Machine* feel, that is to say, a junkyard style of arrangement that surrounds its trot.

At moments, these bits of *studiocraft* peek out to colour, in a positive way, the emotional ambience. In *Planet Eli*, Barlow experiments with noise, dissonance and unusual arrangements of ordinary instruments ... subtly, never

toothsome tunes with a good rhythm, great hook to the chorus and lyrics that are sweet and bittersweet at the same time. I can't get it out of my head.

Kim Barlow will be performing in and around BC and Alberta in support of *Champ* for March and April check out her tour dates at www.myspace.com/kimbarlow.

Bill Polonsky can be contacted through his website strangethingsdone.com.

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